

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00

COME-00 DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 FAA-00

L-03 TRSE-00 OMB-01 IO-13 MC-02 /067 W

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R 041025Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8140

INFO AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 1535

CASABLANCA FOR RCAA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAIR EGEN GB

SUBJECT: CIVAIR: EXPANSION OF AIR GABON

SUMMARY: DIXON SPEAS REPRESENTATIVES DEPARTED JULY 30 WITH SIGNED CONTRACT AND LARGE PART OF NECESSARY DATA FOR THEIR STUDY. BOEING REPRESENTATIVES MET AUGUST 3 WITH PRESIDENT AND KEY MINISTERS TO PRESENT THEIR STUDY AND OFFER AND ARE AWAITING INITIAL GOG REACTION. GOG INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING POSSIBLE MANAGEMENT/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CONTRACT WITH PAN-AMERICAN. ACTION REQUESTED: DEPARTMENT CONTACT PAN-AMERICAN TO DETERMINE INTEREST AND POSSIBILITY OF PROMPT VISIT TO LIBREVILLE BY PAN-AM REPRESENTATIVE. END SUMMARY.

1. DIXON SPEAS REPRESENTATIVES KIP AND DORMOY LEFT LIBREVILLE JULY 30 WITH SIGNED CONTRACT AND LARGE PART OF DATA NECESSARY FOR THEIR STUDY. THEY HAVE PROMISED DELIVER COMPLETED STUDY APPROXIMATELY MID-OCTOBER, AND WILL TRY TO ADVANCE DELIVERY DATE TO MAXIMUM EXTENT
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POSSIBLE.

2. BOEING REPRESENTATIVES MAUGER AND BELYAMANI, ACCOMPANIED BY ME, MET AUGUST 3 WITH PRESIDENT BONGO, DIRECTEUR DE CABINET MAYILA, PRIME MINISTER, AND MINISTERS OF FINANCE, PLAN, TRANSPORT, AND MINES AND ENERGY TO PRESENT THEIR OWN FEASIBILITY STUDY AND OFFER. BOEING HAS PROPOSED THAT AIR GABON BUY ONE 747 COMBI FOR EUROPEAN SERVICE AND TWO 737S FOR REGIONAL ROUTES, LEASING ONE 707 AND ONE 737 FOR INTERIM PERIOD PRIOR TO DELIVERY OF NEW AIRCRAFT. KEY MINISTERS WILL MEET AGAIN AUGUST 4 TO EXAMINE BOEING STUDY AND PROPOSAL AND MAY DECIDE ON PRELIMINARY COMMITMENT TO ORDER ONE OR MORE OF AIRCRAFT SUGGESTED BY BOEING. (COMMENT: BOEING REPRESENTATIVES HAVE MADE CLEAR THAT SUCH PRELIMINARY COMMITMENT IS REVOCABLE AT ANY TIME PRIOR TO SIGNING OF FINAL CONTRACT TWO OR THREE MONTHS HENCE. DIXON SPEAS STUDY, WITH ITS EVALUATION OF VARIOUS AIRCRAFT, WILL BE AVAILABLE WITHIN THIS TIME FRAME.)

3. PRESIDENT USED OCCASION OF MEETING TO BRIEF MINISTERS PRESENT ON GABONESE RELATIONS WITH AIR AFRIQUE AND BACKGROUND TO TENTATIVE DECISION ON EXPANSION OF AIR GABON (ONLY MINTRANSPORT RAWIRI WAS FULLY INFORMED ON THIS QUESTION). BONGO ALLEGED THAT HOUPHOUET HAS SPURNED HIS REQUEST THAT GABONESE BE NAMED DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AIR AFRIQUE IN RECOGNITION OF IMPORTANT FINANCIAL ROLE PLAYED BY GOG, AND EXPRESSED PARTICULAR IRRITATION AT HOUPHOUET'S CLAIM THAT GABONESE HAD NO QUALIFIED PERSONNEL TO OFFER. PRESIDENT SAID THAT GOF HAD GIVEN HIM NO SUPPORT IN HIS DISPUTE WITH AIR AFRIQUE, BUT GISCARD HAD CONCEDED IN SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION THAT DECISION ON CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP IN AIR AFRIQUE WAS ENTIRELY ONE FOR GOG. INDEED FRENCH AMBASSADOR HAD BEEN TO SEE HIM ONLY THREE DAYS EARLIER WITH PROPOSAL FOR SALE OF AIRBUS TO EXPANDED AIR GABON, COMPLETE WITH FINANCING TERMS.

4. IN ENSUING DISCUSSION BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND MINISTERS PRESENT, BONGO REITERATED HIS EXPECTATION THAT AIR FRANCE WOULD BE SOURCE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR AIR GABON AND HIS DESIRE ASSOCIATE OTHER AIRLINES (INCLUDING PAN-AMERICAN) WITH ITS CAPITALIZATION AND OPERATIONS. IN
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RESPONSE TO HIS QUERY ON LATTER POINT, I TOLD PRESIDENT (AS I HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD MAYILA) THAT QUESTION WAS ONE FOR PRIVATE AMERICAN AIRLINES TO DECIDE, BUT THAT I PERSONALLY WAS UNSURE WHETHER SUCH FIRM AS PAN-AMERICAN WOULD BE INTERESTED IN FINANCIAL PARTICIPATION IN ABSENCE OF MANAGEMENT/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CONTRACT. PRESIDENT THEN COMMENTED TO MINISTERS PRESENT THAT HE WOULD ASK GOF TO DESIGNATE AIR FRANCE RATHER THAN UTA AS

FRENCH CARRIER SERVING LIBREVILLE, AS HE DID NOT WANT UTA (WHICH CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH AIR AFRIQUE) TO CONTINUE DRAWING PROFITS FROM ROUTES TO GABON.

5. IN SUBSEQUENT EXCHANGE WITH MAYILA, LATTER NOTED THAT GOG MAY HAVE TO BUY AIRBUS RATHER THAN 737 FOR REGIONAL ROUTES IN RESPONSE TO FRENCH POLITICAL PRESSURES. GOG NEEDS GOF HELP IN ARRANGING AIR FRANCE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ALSO IN OBTAINING DESIGNATION OF AIR FRANCE RATHER THAN UTA AS FRENCH CARRIER SERVING LIBREVILLE. PURCHASE OF AIRBUS, MAYILA IMPLIED, MIGHT BECOME FRENCH QUID PRO QUO FOR SUCH SUPPORT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 1535

CASABLANCA FOR RCAA

6. AS WAY OF AVOIDING ONE OF THESE PRESSURES, MAYILA ASKED WHETHER PAN-AMERICAN MIGHT CONSTITUTE ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF MANAGEMENT/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE. I TOLD HIM IT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING PAN-AMERICAN MIGHT BE PREPARED RESPOND POSITIVELY TO GOG INVITATION, BUT THAT WE HAD NOT QUERIED THEM BECAUSE MAYILA HIMSELF HAD TOLD US GOG WAS GOING AHEAD WITH AIR FRANCE. IN WAKE OF AIRBUS OFFER AND POTENTIAL POLITICAL PRESSURES, MAYILA SAID, HE WOULD

NOW WELCIME OPPORTUNITY DISCUSS THIS ALTERNATIVE DIRECTILY WITH PAN-AMERICAN IF LATTER INTERESTED, AND ASKED US QUERY AIRLINE ON HIS BEHALF. IF RESPONSE FAVORABLE, HE ADDED, HE HOPED PAN-AMERICAN REPRESENTATIVE COULD VISIT LIBREVILLE AT EARLIEST CONVENIENCE FOR MORE DETAILED EXPLORATION AND FIRM PROPOSAL.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS MAYILA'S QUERY TO PAN-AMERICAN NEW YORK (AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PREVIOUSLY SUGGESTED IN KINSHASA 6172 QUERY BE DIRECTED TO MR. RICE) AND ADVISE US WHAT RESPONSE AIRLINE WISHES US PASS TO MAYILA. IF PAN-AMERICAN WILLING SEND REPRESENTATIVE HERE
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FOR FURTHER DISCUSSIONS, ADVISE PROPOSED DATES SO THAT WE CAN CONFIRM WITH GOG.

8. COMMENT: INITIAL RECEPTION OF BOEING PROPOSALS WAS EXTREMELY FAVORABLE, ESPECIALLY SUGGESTION OF 747 COMBI FOR EUROPEAN SERVICE. BOEING REPRESENTATIVES POINTED OUT TO MAYILA UNSUITABILITY OF AIR BUS FOR REGIONAL ROUTES ON GROUNDS OF EXCESSIVE CAPACITY AND FOR EUROPEAN ROUTES ON GROUNDS OF SHORT RANGE, AND REMAIN HOPEFUL THAT GOG WILL OPT FOR MORE HOMOGENEOUS FLEET WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM CHOICE OF 737 AS WELL. IN THIS SITUATION, WILLINGNESS OF PAN-AMERICAN TO CONSIDER MANAGEMENT/ TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CONTRACT WOULD STRENGTHEN GOG RESISTANCE TO FRENCH PRESSURES ON AIRBUS. AT SAME TIME, WE WILL CONTINUE POINT OUT TO MAYILA AND OTHERS IN GOG DESIRABILITY OF AWAITING DIXON SPEAS STUDY (AND PRESUMABLY DISCUSSIONS WITH POTENTIAL TECHNICAL PARTNERS AS WELL) BEFORE MAKING FINAL COMMITMENT ON SELECTION OF AIRCRAFT FOR EXPANDED SERVICE. STEIGMAN

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